

WINTER 1979

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PRAIRIES



INSIDE—

- German Russians & Political Offices
- Christmas Recipes
- The Hutterites

Why German-Russian settlers didn't run for public office

By William Jahraus

Introduction

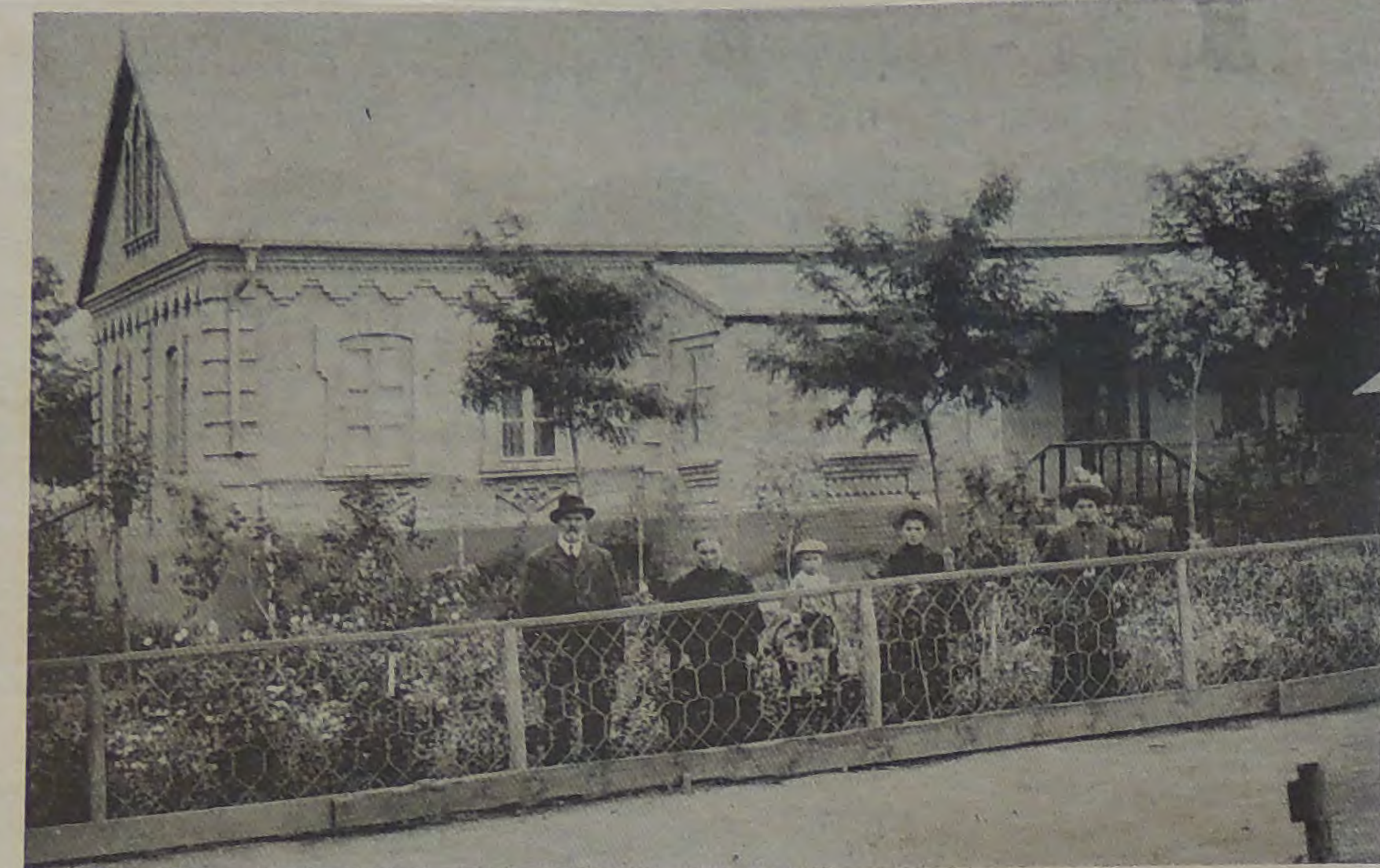
People of German-Russian descent make up the second largest ethnic group in the state of North Dakota. Few, however, have held high public office throughout the state's history. A possible explanation for this phenomenon may be the unique background of these people. When the first German-Russians moved into what is now North Dakota they brought with them certain customs and traditions which they had learned and practiced in Europe for generations. In North Dakota they acted according to those customs, and one result was an unwillingness to become directly involved in government beyond the local level. This thesis will attempt to show that the conservative, long-established attitudes and traditions of the first German-Russians in North Dakota broke down and changed very slowly and played a decisive role in determining the way these people thought and acted. Old habits often die hard; in the case of the first German-Russians of North Dakota this retention of habits seems to be a major factor in explaining their political behavior. The focus of this study is McIntosh County, North Dakota, because it contained within its borders the greatest concentration of German-Russians in the state for the time under consideration, 1889-1915.

Chapter I

The German-Russian Settlers of McIntosh County

German immigrants from Russia began arriving in what is now North Dakota in the 1880s. More settled in North Dakota than in any other state of the Union. They tended to concentrate their settlements in the south-central region of the state because that area was largely uninhabited and therefore a place where these clannish settlers could remain together. The first German immigrants, who had come to the United States from Russia a decade earlier, selected an area of what is now southeastern South Dakota for the same reason. Prior to that they had considered settling further east, but when they discovered that part of the country was populated and land for farming was available only in scattered localities, they decided to move on, and eventually selected an uninhabited region in Dakota Territory north of Yankton.

The greatest concentration of German-Russian settlement in North Dakota occurred in McIntosh County, located midway across the state on the South Dakota border. The population of McIntosh County in 1890 was 3,248. Of the number, 2,221 were foreign-born. It is likely that most of the foreign-born were German-Russians. The population of the



Many German colonists in South Russia prospered, especially when the Russian government encouraged the development of the South Russian frontier along the Black Sea. German agricultural skills were highly appreciated, especially from the Russian official point of view. Later, the government changed that attitude. An indication of one family's prosperity is shown in the above photo. The luxurious brick home was owned by Mr. and Mrs. August Koth in Postal, located near Odessa. Mrs. Koth's first husband—a Geiszler—was a big farmer. When he died after being kicked in the head by a horse, she later married the farm's foreman, Koth. Later, he successfully operated a clinic in Postal where people went to get hot steam baths. Mr. and Mrs. Kost are shown standing by the fence in the above photo.

county in 1900 was 4,818 and of that number 2,200 were born in Russia. The county's population in 1910 totaled 7,251 and of that number 5,745 were either born in Russia or had parents who were born there. From all indications most of these foreign-born inhabitants of McIntosh County were Germans, not Russians. Early newspapers, government records, and memoirs substantiate extensive German settlement. The first newspapers, such as *The Ashley Tribune*, *The McIntosh Republican*, and *The Wishek News*, had large German sections—obviously printed for a German-reading public. They had no Russian sections. Government records include many German names and few, if any, Russian names. The memoirs of Nina Farley Wishek, one of the first inhabitants of the county, contain many references to German-speaking settlers and none to Russian-speaking pioneers. Evidence today suggests a pervasive German influence in the county. Many people still speak German on the streets of Ashley, Lehr, Wishek, and Zeeland. People still attend German services in the large Lutheran churches of Ashley and Wishek. Old-timers prefer to speak German rather than English. In casual English conversation among the young, German expressions are still common (e.g. "macht gut," "wie geht's"). Slang and swearing are often in German (e.g. "dummewetter," "scheisskopf"). Sentence patterns are sometimes Germanic (e.g. "run the stairs up," "drive the block around"). Pronunciation of many English words is Germanic in accent (e.g. garage = "krach," jug = "chuk").

Chapter II

Origin Of The German-Russian Settlers Of McIntosh County

The German immigrants who settled in McIntosh County were known as "German-Russians" because they were the descendants of Germans who had emigrated to Russia from Germany in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Most had left their homelands in southwestern Germany to escape the disruption and destruction caused by wars of Frederick the Great and Napoleon and to take advantage of the promises contained within the timely manifestos of two rulers of Russia, Catherine II and Alexander I. Both manifestos promised prospective German emigrants free land in Russia, free transportation to Russia, interest-free loans, the right of local self-government, freedom of religion, exemption from military service, and the right to leave Russia. The purposes of the manifestos were: (1) to attract skilled



The above photo was taken at the turn of the century at Byam's Studio in Ellendale, North Dakota. The photography-session was a special event, requiring the best clothes. Standing in the back is Frieda Forrest. She operated a hotel in Ashley, North Dakota. With her is Dora Iden and her two children.

craftsmen and farmers to help develop areas along the Volga River and Black Sea which Russia had recently acquired, and (2) to attract settlers who would serve as a buffer against Russia's hostile neighbors, the Asiatic tribes in the East and the Turks in the South. Other Germans left for Russia to escape persecution for their Pietistic beliefs. Others were forced out of Poland by native Poles when Napoleon had created an independent Polish state.

Whatever the motivation, nearly 100,000 Germans made their way to the barren steppes of central and southern Russia in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Those who survived the long and difficult journey began the task of creating a new life for themselves in an alien environment. These German pioneers were the forefathers of the

German-Russians who later emigrated to the United States.

In Russia the German immigrants established hundreds of small, agricultural communities within which they carefully maintained their German language and culture. They did so because they felt superior to the backward Russian peasants who surrounded them and because they wanted to preserve their identity as a German people in a foreign environment. Accordingly, they learned and spoke only German; they established their own churches and schools; they celebrated their own festivals and holidays; and they ran their own communities. They had little to do with the Russians who lived nearby. As a result, the Germans in Russia developed closed, tightly-knit communities which were cut

The Dakota Territory offered marvelous possibilities of free land—or at a low price.

off from the outside world. It was within such communities that most of the people who originally settled in McIntosh County acquired the conservative beliefs and values which, to a great extent, shaped their lifestyle in North Dakota.

Chapter III

Reasons For German-Russian Emigration To The United States

Thousands of German-Russians emigrated to the United States in the late 19th century when the reforms of Tsar Alexander II and the nationalistic policies of Tsar Alexander III threatened their way of life. Others left for the United States at the same time to acquire free or inexpensive land made possible by the Homestead Act of 1862 and the land grants to American railroads in the 1870s and 1880s.

Tsar Alexander II's reform of local government (zemstvo) in 1864 triggered the first migration of German-Russians to the United States. This reform provided for a system of district and provincial assemblies in which all classes in Russian society would be represented through a process of indirect election. In 1871 Tsar Alexander II officially incorporated the German villages into the zemstvo system and, in the same decree, abolished the special rights and privileges of the German colonists. The former did not irritate the German colonists because it did not radically change their local government. (They continued to elect their own officials—as they had done before the zemstvo reform.) The latter angered the German colonists because it deprived them of the special rights they had enjoyed for many years. As a result of this reform, small groups of German-Russians began emigrating to the United States in the early 1870s.

Tsar Alexander II's judicial reforms of 1864 also irritated the German colonists in Russia. Prior to this reform, the Germans had had their own village and district courts which were administered by their own local officials. Only the most severe crimes were processed in a Russian court. Alexander's judiciary reform deprived the German colonists of their judicial privileges. Russian judges, as a result of the reform, were appointed for every district, including the German districts. Generally, they had little sympathy for the Germans within their jurisdiction. Small crimes against the Germans went unpunished and even major crimes were overlooked. Consequently, the German colonists developed an attitude of district towards Russian judges.

Tsar Alexander II's reform of the military prompted the first significant departure of German-Russians for America in the 1870s and 1880s. In 1874 Tsar Alexander II issued a decree which declared all young men in Russia subject to military service for six years. The German-Russians correctly regarded that act as a repudiation of the promise of freedom from military service made to them by the manifestos of Catherine II and Alexander I. As a result of this reform, thousands of German-Russians emigrated to the United States. Frederick Mutchelknaus, the son of one of the first German-Russians to leave Russia, noted in his memoirs that the main reason his father left Russia was to escape military conscription. Rose Kurle of Bowdle, S.D., and John A. Shick of Eureka, S.D., children of original German-Russian immigrants to the Dakotas in the 1880s, stated in interviews that their fathers left Russia to evade service in the Russian Army. William Hoffman of Bowdle, S.D., and Henry Huber of Ashley, N.D., original German-Russian immigrants to the United States in the early 1900s, indicated in interviews that they left Russia for the same reason.

The autocratic policies of Tsar Alexander III, who succeeded in 1881, encouraged more German-Russians to pack their bags for America. In 1889 he created the position of the land captain whose primary task was to serve as his representative at the district and village

levels. Usually the land captain was selected from the district's lesser nobility by the Ministry of Interior. His duties included confirming all locally-elected officials, evaluating the decisions of the local assemblies and courts, and reporting on local developments. Adam Giesinger, an authority on the German-Russians, noted the impact the land captains had on the German-Russians:

For the German colonists the institution of the land captain had even worse consequences than it had for the Russian peasants. Up to this time the colonists had not felt too much their incorporation into the Russian local government system, because closest to home, at the village and volost level, they were governed by their own officials. Now the land captain, usually an ardent Russian nationalist determined to make these "foreigners" conform, constantly interfered in their local affairs. As a result the 1890s became a period of bitter quarrels between the colonist leaders and the local representative of the Tsar's authority. At no time since their arrival had the colonists been so harassed by Russian officialdom.

Alexander III's nationalistic policies caused great consternation within the German colonies in Russia. When Alexander III became Tsar, he announced that Russia should belong to the Russians. One of his main goals was assimilating all of his non-Russian subjects into the general Russian population by Russianizing all the schools in Russia, including the German colonists' schools. In 1892, according to Giesinger:

All schools... were placed under the jurisdiction of the Russian school inspector. He chose the teachers and enforced the program of studies laid down by the Ministry of Education. Usually a rabid nationalist, appointed to his position because he was in sympathy with government policy, he made the schools as Russian as he could, to the detriment of the German language. Except for the teaching of religion and German, Russian became the language of instruction in both the Zentralschulen and the village schools. Two-thirds of the school term was devoted to Russian even at the primary level.

The German colonists were likely irritated in 1892 when Tsar Alexander III had the names of all the German villages changed from German to Russian titles.

The Russian press was severely anti-German in the late 19th century. This was probably due to growing nationalism within Russia and Germany at that time and a breakdown in relationship between the two nations after Chancellor Bismarck's resignation in 1890. Russkii Vestnik, a monthly publication, included an article which denounced the Germans within Russia as enemies of the state who received money from the German Imperial Bank to acquire South Russia for Germany. Michael Nuss, a Reformed minister who emigrated to the United States in the 1890s, noted in his memoirs:

We probably would have remained in the Crimea for many more years if we had not seen an article in a Russian newspaper of the following text: "In order to win over the Germans, all have to be friendlier and meet them more than halfway, and let offices and honor come to them, and so forth. With such an approach it won't take long before we have them completely Russianized." So I said to myself, "That is the last straw; now the days of my residence in Russia are numbered; now we are going to America."

Many German-Russians left Russia in the late 19th century because growing Russian nationalism threatened their way of life.

Many German-Russians also emigrated to the United States to take advantage of free or inexpensive land made available there by the Homestead Act of 1862 and by the land grants made to the American

railroads in the 1870s and 1880s. During the 19th century the German colonies in Russia had experienced significant population growth. "By 1870 there were 260,000 Germans in the Volga region, more than 150,000 in the Black Sea region and nearly 30,000 in the western province of Volhynia," more than four times the original number of colonists. At first this growth in population resulted in the establishment of many daughter colonies, but, as the 19th century unfolded, it became more and more difficult to obtain land for new settlements. Simultaneously, in the United States, large amounts of land became available for settlement. That news reached the German colonists by word of mouth and by the intensive advertising efforts of American railroads and land companies. Joseph S. Height, a German-Russian historian, believes that "the predominant reason that motivated the German colonists to leave Russia and seek their fortune in American was the quest for land." Marie Martin of Eureka, S.D., Rose Kurle of Bowdle, S.D., David Eisenbeisz of Bowdle, John A. Shick of Eureka, Jake Diede of Lehr, N.D. and William Schuler of Lehr, children of German-Russian immigrants to the Dakotas, stated in interviews that their fathers came to the United States primarily to acquire farmland.

Chapter IV

Officeholding and Ethnicity Of the First German-Russian Settlers of McIntosh County

The German-Russians who came to the United States brought with them distinct beliefs, values, and traditions which they had practiced in Russia for many years. After they arrived they continued to live according to these conservative values, and one result was a reluctance to become involved in government beyond their own communities.

Individuals of German-Russian descent make up the second largest ethnic group in North Dakota, but few of them have ever held high public office. According to Fr. William Sherman, only five of the state's 168 major officeholders up to 1965 had been of German-Russian origin. This infinitesimal degree of direct participation at the state level of government seems unusual for such a large ethnic group. (German-Russians made up 10 percent of the state's population in 1910.) Persons of Norwegian descent, who make up the largest ethnic group in the state (Norwegians made up 21 percent of North Dakota's population in 1910), have shown a greater willingness to participate directly in state-level politics. For example, nearly

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When the Russian press began to encourage anti-German attitudes, more than one German living in Russia said, "Now it is time to go to America!"

15 percent of the members of the North Dakota State Legislature between 1901-1913 were born in Norway. Less than one percent of the members for the same time period were born in Russia. In an effort to explain this phenomenon, this study focuses on McIntosh County because it contained the greatest concentration of German-Russians in the state between 1889-1915. The degree of officeholding by the first German-Russians in the county was determined by consulting available state, county, town, and school district records. The ethnicity of these people was determined by examining available government records, newspapers, memoirs, textbooks, and by interviewing some of the inhabitants of the county. Then an effort was made to explain German-Russian officeholding—at all levels—by relating it to the unusual background of the German-Russian people.

The first German-Russians of McIntosh County showed a clear willingness to participate in local government. They held many school district, town, and county offices between 1889 and 1915. Their degree of officeholding at the local level did not correspond exactly to their population density in the county (79 percent in 1910), but it indicated a serious desire to become involved in local government. For example, there were 117 officeholders in the county between 1898 and 1915. Of that number 63 (or 54 percent) were of German-Russian origin, 44 (or 37 percent) were unknown origin, nine (or eight percent) were native-born Americans, and one (or one percent) was of Norwegian ancestry. It is probable that at least 25 of the officeholders of unknown origin were German-Russians because their names are Germanic, and, at that time, only a small percentage of McIntosh County's population had been born in Germany. Adding the 25 unknown to the German-Russian category would increase the German-Russian percentage from 54 percent to 75 percent, thereby indicating significant participation.

The first German-Russians of McIntosh County were nearly as involved in officeholding at the town level of government. For example, there were 60 elected officials in the town of Ashley between 1903 and 1915. Of the 60, 32 (or 53 percent) were German-Russians, 18 (or 30 percent) were of unidentifiable origin, eight (or 13 percent) were native-born Americans, and two (or three percent) were Scots.

It is likely that at least nine of the 18 unknown were German-Russians because of their Germanic names. Adding the nine unknown to the German-Russian category would increase the German-Russian degree of participation from 53 to 68 percent—again indicative of significant involvement.

The first German-Russians of McIntosh County were less active in county-level officeholding than they were at the town and school district levels. For example, there were 137 county officeholders in McIntosh County between 1889-1915. Of these 56 (or 41 percent) were German-Russians, 49 (or 26 percent) were native-born Americans, eight (or six percent) were Germans, and the remaining 24 (or 17 percent) were of unknown origin. It is probable that five of the 24 county officeholders of unknown origin were German-Russians because of their Germanic names. Adding the five unknowns to the German-Russian category would increase the German-Russian participation from 41 to 45 percent.

The first German-Russians of McIntosh County held a greater percentage of local government offices than all other national groups combined. Their degree of local officeholding compares quite favorably to that of members of the largest ethnic group in North Dakota, the Norwegians. The Norwegian settlers of Traill County, North Dakota (where they made up 54 percent of the population in 1910) held 84 percent of the school district offices in the Mayville-Portland area between 1889-1915; they held 70 percent of the town offices in Mayville between 1900-1915, and they held

64 percent of the county offices between 1889-1915.

The first German-Russians of McIntosh County showed a definite unwillingness to participate directly in government beyond the local level. They held few state offices between 1889-1915. During those years McIntosh County was served by 44 state senators and representatives. Of these 44, only six (or 14 percent) were German-Russians, 33 (or 75 percent) were Americans, three (or seven percent) were Germans, and the remaining two (or four

percent) were of unknown origin.

This small degree of state officeholding by the first German-Russians of McIntosh County seems unusual for a county which was so densely populated by German-Russians. Traill County, North Dakota (a county of heavy Norwegian concentration), provides a vivid contrast. Between 1889 and 1915 Traill County was served by 60 state senators and representatives. Of the 60 officeholders, 35 (or 58 percent) were Norwegians, 17 (or 28 percent) were Americans, four (or seven

percent) were Canadians, and four (or seven percent) were of unknown origin.

The German-Russians' reluctance to seek high public office in North Dakota was not due to their failure to legally qualify for such positions. The qualifications for a state senator, at that time, included: resident of the state for two years, a minimum age of 25, and qualified elector of the district in which chosen. The qualifications for a state representative were the same with the exception that the minimal age was 21. In



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order to be a qualified elector in North Dakota, an individual had to be male, at least 21, and a resident of the state for one year, of a county six months, and of a precinct 90 days. One also had to be a United States citizen or had to have on file for a year a declaration of intention (or "first paper") to become a United States citizen. In actuality a greater percentage of McIntosh County German-Russians qualified for state offices than did their Norwegian counterparts in Traill County. In 1910, 83 percent of McIntosh County's foreign-born adult males (who made up nearly 75 percent of the total number of adult males in the county) were qualified as electors because they were either naturalized citizens or had taken out their "first papers." In contrast only 70 percent of Traill County's foreign-born males (who made up 55 percent of the total number of adult males in the county) qualified as electors in 1910.

An explanation for the unusual political behavior of the first German-Russians of McIntosh County is their background. When they arrived in North Dakota they brought with them certain customs and traditions which they had practiced in Russia for decades. In North Dakota they lived according to those traditions, and one outcome was an unwillingness to actively participate in government beyond the local level.

The first German-Russians of McIntosh County did not actively seek political offices beyond the local level because they had no tradition of holding high public office. In Russia their role in governing terminated at the district level. Beyond that level all officials were Russians who were either selected by the national government in St. Petersburg, or, after the zemstvo legislation, by the provincial assemblies. The regional and national boards which oversaw the German colonies were made up of Russians with whom the German colonists had little contact or influence. According to Gotthilf Herberg of Ashley, N.D., an original German-Russian immigrant to the United States in 1922, one reason the first German-Russians did not seek high public office in North Dakota because "they had no tradition of participating in high level politics in Russia." William Hoffman of Bowdle, S.D., another original German-Russian immigrant to the United States in 1911, stated in an interview:

In Russia the Russians were in control of the government. Here, in America, the Americans were in control. The governors were never German-Russian. The German-Russians I knew didn't care for state-level politics. They didn't want to get involved beyond their own communities.

According to Julius Werre of Lehr, N.D., the son of one of the first German-Russians to emigrate to the United States in 1873, "One reason the first German-Russians were unwilling to seek state-level political positions in North Dakota was due to the fact that those who came to North Dakota had no tradition of participating in the high Russian government." Said Mary Rathke of Eureka, S.D.: "There weren't

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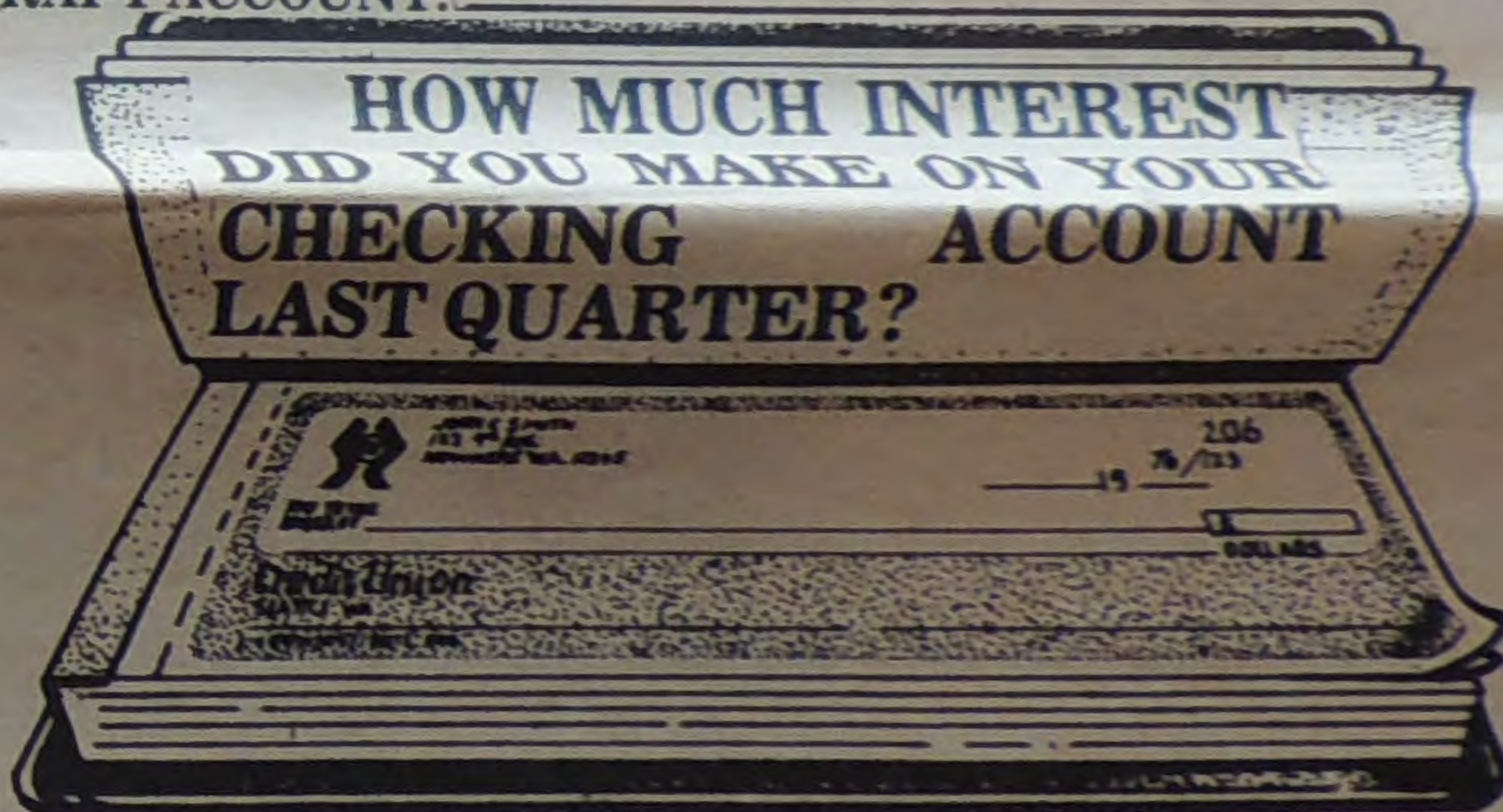
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The German-Russian colonists had a basic mistrust of high officials—a sentiment that was based on their attitudes toward officials in Russia.



The church was an important part of the early pioneers in the Dakotas. Pictured in the photo above is a confirmation class at St. John's Lutheran Church, a rural congregation southeast of Ashley, North Dakota. In the background is the parsonage.



As was to be expected because of the difficult times, education in this part of the Dakotas at the turn of the century was often limited, usually confined to just a few years of formal schooling. At left is one of the early teachers, Frances Miller. She taught in a country school—the Jewell school district, located east of Ashley, North Dakota. She was from Indiana and lived with the Ludwig Thurn family while teaching here.

Cover Photo

His humble beginning became the miracle of miracles for all who believe.

By Laurie Mehrer

Volume 5, No. 3 Winter 1979

PRAIRIES is published quarterly by Warren Overlie, Ashley, North Dakota 58413. Yearly subscription price is \$4.80. Single copy price is \$1.50. Second class postage paid at Ashley, North Dakota 58413. Postmaster: Send form 3579 to PRAIRIES, Box 178, Ashley, North Dakota 58413. We invite the submission of unsolicited manuscripts with an accompanying stamped envelope, but cannot assume responsibility for same. USPS 356-930.

any Germans in the high government positions in Russia, the government there was run by the Russians." Rathke came to the United States in 1910.

A second reason for the German-Russians' unwillingness to seek high-level public office in North Dakota was their traditional attitude of distrust toward Russian officials. In 1889 Tsar Alexander III sent "land captains" into the German villages. These inspectors were notoriously corrupt and were despised by the German colonists. Herberg indicated that his father succeeded in keeping one of his sons out of the Russian Army by bribing the local land captain. He added that such acts were commonplace. Hoffman mentioned that the Russian inspectors came around to check on his village once a year. "They acted as big shots!" Rathke stated that in 1905 Russian inspectors came into her village and took away every man's gun. "My father cried when they seized his gun," said Rathke, nearly crying herself as she recalled the incident. The German-Russians feared and despised the outside Russian officials. This attitude of suspicion towards outside officials was likely a factor which influenced their unwillingness to participate in state-level politics in North Dakota.

A third factor which prevented the first German-Russians of McIntosh County from seeking high public office was their customary concern for land and farming to the exclusion of almost everything else. Nearly all the German-Russians who lived in Russia were farmers. Many left Russia to acquire land in the United States. When they arrived many homesteaded on the sparsely settled upper Great Plains. The land they obtained in the Dakotas was part of an open, desolate plain that often required years of backbreaking labor to make productive. The German-Russians' preoccupation with farming and making the land productive prevented many of them from participating in state-level politics. They were too busy farming. Calford Meyer of Ashley, N.D., son of German-Russian immigrants, stated: "Most of the Germans who came here were basically farmers. They were near the land. They were land-conscious. The most important thing was to build up an estate—for they had many children." According to Rose Kurle of Bowdle, S.D., daughter of original German-Russian immigrants:

Nearly all the German-Russians were farmers. They wanted land. They worked hard to make the land productive. They "dug out the rocks." They felt that the "Yankees" were a little bit lazy. The "Yankees" didn't like to work too hard. They came, took up a claim, built a shanty, lived there a short time to "prove up" the claim, then sold it for a quick profit and left.

Werre noted that "the first German-Russians had so much work to do that they had no time for anything else." And according to Rathke:

My husband was too busy working on the farm to take time to go to school or run for office. He was too interested in farming. He had a lot of rocks to pick, sod to break up, and crops to put in. He was an outside man. Our neighbors were like him. They, too, were busy farmers, having little education and speaking only German.

The traditional vocation of the German-Russians was farming. In Russia, most of them had been farmers. A few may have been teachers or ministers, but the overwhelming majority were farmers. When they arrived in the United States they did what they had done in Russia—they farmed. Their serious preoccupation with farming did not allow them the time or energy to develop the skills necessary for high-level politics in this country. It is likely that the Norwegian immigrants, as a group, were not as preoccupied with farming (as were the German-Russians) because among their numbers were members of Norway's

professional and business class.

A fourth factor which kept the first German-Russians of McIntosh County out of state-level politics was their attitude towards education. Most of the German-Russians who had emigrated to the United States had received a minimal education in Russia. Each German village in Russia had a school which was irregularly attended by the children of the village from ages six to 14. At first the schools were primarily German institutions. The major subjects were German and religion. Later, during the reign of Tsar Alexander III, the German schools were partially Russianized. As a result, the German children were forced to learn Russian and various secular subjects; however, they continued to learn German and religion as well. These village schools were poorly equipped and staffed. Teachers were often paid one-half or one-third the salary of the community's cowherd. The Germans regarded the school as important for preserving the German language and religion; otherwise it was unimportant. Few children went on to high school after confirmation at 14. Only those who intended to become teachers or ministers went on. A vast majority graduated to work in the fields. "Few went on to high school. Most had no interest in higher education," recalled Herberg. There was no custom of higher education in Russia among the Germans who lived there. When the German-Russians arrived in North Dakota they brought along the custom of minimal education. Therefore, they and many of their children did not obtain the skills and confidence necessary to participate effectively in high political positions. Max A. Wishek of Ashley, N.D., the son of John and Nina Farley Wishek, original settlers of the county, recalled:

The German-Russians weren't too keen on education. They believed in hard work. Sometimes their children had to be forced to attend school. When their children reached eighth grade that was it. In 1919 when I went on to college there were only a few who went on to institutions of higher learning. They didn't believe in higher education. It was more important for them to work and get ahead. It was more important to buy a quarter of land than send a child to college.

According to Meyer:

My father's education was limited to the third grade. Very few of the German boys in his time got beyond the eighth grade. Most of the young people stayed home and helped on the farm. They didn't consider higher education that important. It was the English-speaking people who were concerned with higher education. Most of the Germans who came here were basically farmers. They were near the land. They were not well-educated. As a result of this handicap, they never entered high-level politics.

Concerning education, Herberg recalled, "Few went beyond the eighth grade in McIntosh County because they were not accustomed to doing so in Russia. They brought with them no tradition of higher education. They had no colleges in Russia. They established none here. The Norwegian immigrants, in contrast, established many colleges in the United States.

When questioned about the reluctance to participate in state-level politics, many first-generation inhabitants of McIntosh County expressed as reasons their lack of a good education and the inability to understand English. For example, John A. Shick, who came to the Dakotas in 1889 from Russia, stated: "I didn't run for high office because of a lack of education, the inability to speak English well enough, and because I was too busy on the farm. I didn't know much about the government. In some cases the first German-Russians didn't even send their children to elementary school. Rathke recalled: "Many of the German children, in the area where I grew up, were not sent to school. They were kept home to work." Kurle stated: "My father believed that the girls didn't need much of an education. They should learn to cook, wash, and iron and

The Old General Store

By Ben Walsh

It was called the general store, that forerunner of our present-day supermarket and clothing store, combined. And while enjoying the conveniences and efficiency of our modern stores, it might prove both interesting and educational if one were to take the time to study the general store which was everywhere to be found in the Northwest both before and after the turn of the century.

By so doing, one might come to realize and appreciate how much the retail business has advanced through the years.

Although it bore the name of general store, perhaps the title of trading post might have been a more appropriate name for a business such as it was, because its main function was in trading one commodity for another. This was especially true in the farming communities of the Northwest which made up the bulk of the business. Farmers living within a radius of many miles came to trade in any of the small towns, bringing with them their week's farm produce to trade for groceries and clothing. The farm produce consisted of butter (not cream in those early years), eggs, and vegetables such as potatoes, onions, carrots, and others. The reader must not gather the impression that the merchant handled the farm produce as a favor to his farm customers, for such was not the case. He also had his urban customers to whom he sold the produce which the farmer had traded for groceries. Before the grocer could sell, he must first buy.

In the event that the farmer's bill for the produce sold amounted to more than his bill for groceries for that day, he was

issued "store chips," a form of scrip made of a cheap metal, good only in the store that issued it. However, it was often accepted in payment by other establishments about town because, after all, the coal dealer, banker and blacksmith also bought groceries.

Unlike today, when business is rather evenly distributed throughout the week, in early days Saturday, and especially Saturday afternoon, was the busy day of the week. It was then that the farmers laid aside their work, washed, shaved and donned their best overalls. Generally accompanied by their wives, they came to town to deliver their butter and eggs, and to buy their week's groceries. Those living a considerable distance from town usually left home quite early in the morning for the long ride behind a team of heavy farm horses. Knowing that it would be an all-day trip, they provided for their animals by placing an armful of hay and a feed of oats in the back of the long farm buggy. Upon arriving in town, the horses were driven into a back lot or alley behind the general store. There they were unhitched and tied to the vehicle they had been pulling, and fed the oats and hay.

Just as the manager of a modern supermarket provides for the comfort and convenience of his customers, so also did the early-day merchant provide for his—but in far different ways. Having left home in the morning, it was necessary that these people partake of food before returning home in the evening. Many of



Standing on the main street at Merrieworth, North Dakota—in another era.

these people (especially those from Europe) had never eaten a meal in a restaurant, nor did they care to. This was not because they were financially unable, but rather because those thrifty people considered eating in a restaurant an unnecessary expense, and the 25 cents for a meal could be saved, or put to better use. It was because of this that some merchants (not all) provided tables in the back room of their store where their country patrons could eat a lunch. There

being no bread sold in the stores of those days (and none for sale anywhere in the smaller towns), it was necessary that these people either bring a loaf from home or substitute it for crackers, which they often did, supplemented with a ring of sausage, a can of sardines or other fish, washed down with a mug of cider drawn from a large keg near at hand. Thus a

GENERAL STORE
Continued on Page 12

WHILE WALKING TO A RURAL SCHOOLHOUSE . . .

Teacher "Froze" Her Feet!

Teaching in a country school was often difficult—especially in the winter—but there were many rewarding times too.

Gladys Rodgers taught at the Wacker School in McPherson County in South Dakota in the early 1940s. Here is her account:

With a salary of \$60 per month, I paid for my room and board, clothing, car expenses, and other needs. During the winter months, I walked to school over the high, steep hills and deep snow drifts.

One morning, not realizing how cold it was, when only about half-way to the school house, a distance of two miles, I froze my hands, face, and feet even though I was warmly dressed with a snowsuit, overshoes and mittens.

Arriving at the school with my lunch basket and briefcase, my frozen fingers were barely able to turn the door knob to open the door! I even had great difficulty starting the fire of the coal heater.

Not until an hour later, when patrons noticed smoke coming from the chimney, did they ever think that I had ventured out. They informed me that the temperature that day was 33 degrees below zero!!

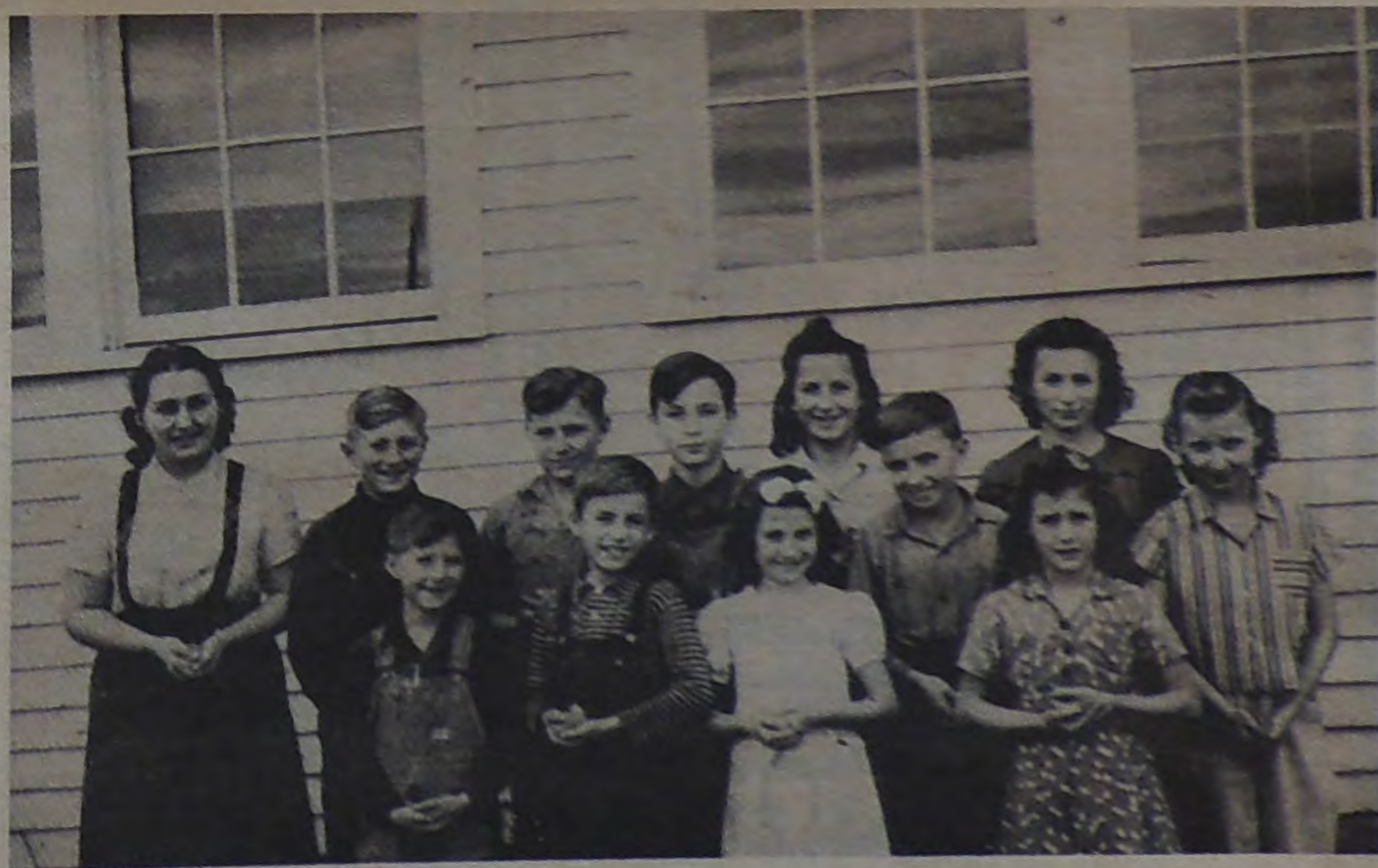
There were many other incidents I shall never forget.

Since most of the people who lived around Wacker School were German-speaking, many of the children had difficulty reading and understanding English.

One day, during hygiene class, the pupils could not comprehend how yeast was formed in preparing dough for baking bread. So I explained it to them in German.

"Ach, du liebe, teacheriee," exclaimed one of the children. "Ve did not know dat you could talk Jerman too!"

In rural schools, the teacher often did her own janitor work. There was no electricity and no water—except that hauled by either the teacher or the patrons. There was no telephone and no inside bathroom—only the outdoor privies. Also, to get to the school, there were no



Wacker School and pupils with teacher, Gladys Rodgers. Front row (left to right): Marvin Hoffman, Marvin Rau (now deceased), Darlene Hoffman, and Eldora Hoffman. Second row (left to right): Gladys Rodgers, teacher; Leo Hoffman, Alvin Rau, Eugene Rau, Bernice Rath, Milbert Kappes, Esther Kappes, and Edna Weissner. (School year: 1941-1942, located northwest of Leola, S.D. AND NEAR Long Lake, S.D.) The school building has since been purchased by Milbert Kappes and moved to his farm.

roads—only cow paths—with heavy gates to open and close.

I remember that at our annual Christmas program, we had a three-act minstrel play in conjunction with a basket social. Emanuel Rath was the auctioneer.

There were many good times. As a teacher, I found it to be most enjoyable because the pupils were well-behaved.

They created no disciplinary problems. Great respect was shown to their teacher for she too loved every one of her pupils. Many lasting friendships were formed.

In fact, nearly two years ago, it was decided to have a school reunion picnic. It was the happy suggestion of Darlene Hoffman (Mrs. Arvin) Hauck of Forbes, North Dakota—and we had a wonderful

time!

Alvin Rau came the longest distance—from Grand Rapids, Michigan. Because of rainy weather, we had the reunion inside the Leola, South Dakota sales barn pavilion. We reminisced, viewed many pictures, and had a very good time thinking about the old days back in 1941 and 1942.



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nourishing and inexpensive meal was purchased and eaten without leaving the store. Perhaps we of today could learn from the example of those early pioneers.

As might be expected, the general store of those days lacked the immaculately clean appearance of our present-day supermarkets, and for a good reason. Unknown then were the sanitary, transparent plastic bags, containing washed and waxed vegetables and tempting displays of fresh fruits. Unknown was the milk carton containing quarts and half-gallons of fresh, clean milk. Anyone wishing to buy milk must contact a dairy farmer who delivered bottled milk daily. As for butter, the housewife generally ordered a pound or more at the store, and trusted to luck for its quality. The farm vegetables were dug from the garden, or brought from the cellar, just as they came from the ground that grew them. They were placed unwashed somewhere upon the floor in view of the customers so that anyone wishing to buy might see what he or she wanted, and buy it. Unlike today, when most foods arrive at the supermarket neatly packaged and ready for the customer, most commodities arrived then in bulk—generally in large barrels, boxes or sacks. These often occupied much of the floor space. It was from these large containers that the clerk filled the customers' orders, weighing or measuring each item, while the customer waited—a time-consuming task indeed. Self-service was unknown then, and there was no smiling, nimble-fingered checkout girl to send a patron quickly on his way.

Unlike today, when shopping is a cold, shrewd business project, when the shopper neither knows, nor cares to know, the owner or manager of the supermarket in which he or she buys, the relationship between an early-day merchant and his customers was one of closeness and warmth. Each storekeeper had "his" customers, and he looked upon them as

belonging to him, in a sense. He spoke their language, which to a foreigner was of great importance and convenience. They looked to him as to a father, for advice and guidance, and like a father he gave it. He was their "father confessor" and they came to him with their troubles and problems. Those who were new in America needed such a friend, and they found that friend in their storekeeper.

Seldom did the store of yesteryear carry the wide variety of goods as found in the modern supermarket. However, there were a few items of merchandise offered for sale then which are not found in the stores of today. For example, the general store sold (and smelled of) kerosene (coal oil). It was pumped from a large tank kept in the back room, or in the basement. Here the good folk came with their three- or five-gallon cans to be filled. It was the fuel used by the housewife in her lamps, and the farmer in his lanterns. With its feeble glow, it lit the homes and lives of that generation.

But the odor of kerosene was not the only smell associated with the general store. There were other odors and smells that came and went with the seasons. There was the unpleasant winter smell of coal dust and coal smoke, and the far more pleasing smells of summer, such as new vegetables, fresh from the good earth.

In the winter the great stove stood in the center of the store, the better to warm the customers and to protect the perishables from frost. Here friends and neighbors met and paused to absorb a little of the friendly heat while they discussed, and sometimes argued, the important issues of the times, for there were grave problems to be solved then, even as today. Was that Bryan fellow's theory of free silver good for the country, or would it bring ruin? Would that young cowboy, Teddy Roosevelt, make a good president, or would he not? The times called for deep thought and soul searching.

Because it was a general store it also sold dry goods which included wearing apparel of various kinds. The price as marked on the price tag of a garment was not necessarily the price that it would sell for. Often, as in the case of a large item such as a suit of clothes, the merchant and the prospective buyer might enter into a duel of wits and tongues, which might continue for quite some time. Eventually a bargain was generally reached when the merchant "knocked off" some of the asking price—something he intended doing from the beginning. That was the customary way of doing business in those early days, and while it might seem to the person of today as a rather poor system, nevertheless it was the way much early-day buying and selling was done.

Perhaps the worst evil to come to the general store was the careless use of credit. Much of the buying was done on credit both by the town people and farmers, with no definite understanding as to when the bills were to be paid. The result was that many were never paid. Because of this loss, a merchant was forced to charge more for his goods in order to stay in business. Any attempt to collect created anger and hard feelings. Often old friends became new enemies. Many of the early-day merchants were forced into bankruptcy as a result. This situation created an opportunity for the chain stores (grocer, clothing and hardware) which extended no credit, suffered no loss, and therefore could undersell the local merchant.

They are all gone now—those general stores that once were found in every town however small, and which served our parents, or the parents of our parents. In their day they were as necessary and essential, and as much a part of the lives of the people they served, as the combined supermarket and clothing store are today. Although they bore little resemblance to our modern stores, and lacked the wide variety of foods found in our supermarkets today, yet they carried most of the foods necessary for daily living, and a few luxuries, many of which are considered necessities today.

The general store—let us of today be ever mindful of the faithful service it gave our forefathers, and treat its memory with the respect and appreciation it so richly deserves! □

The writer of this nostalgic piece is Ben Walsh, who lives in Courtenay, North Dakota.

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In the 1850s in Russia, marriages between Germans and Russians were discouraged

needed no school for that." And Dorothea Herberg of Ashley, N.D., daughter of German-Russian immigrants, recalled: "My father didn't think education was important. My brothers, sisters, and I attended school no more than a month." The low regard for education among the first German-Russians prevented them and their children from obtaining the skills and knowledge necessary for high-level political involvement.

Finally, the first German-Russians in McIntosh County, North Dakota, were reluctant to participate in state-level politics because they were accustomed to keeping to themselves in Russia. In Russia they were fully aware of their minority status. They regarded their communities as tiny islands of German culture in a vast alien environment. They did all they could to preserve their German customs and traditions within their communities. Schools and churches were erected to nurture and preserve the culture that they had brought with them from Germany. As a result, the German-Russians kept to themselves, seldom intermingling with the general Russian populace which encircled them. According to Rathke, the Germans in Russia regarded their Russian neighbors as "dirty, lazy, and lousey!" A friend of hers married a Russian laborer and afterwards was forced to leave the village in disgrace. Herberg recollected the Germans' prejudice toward the Russians:

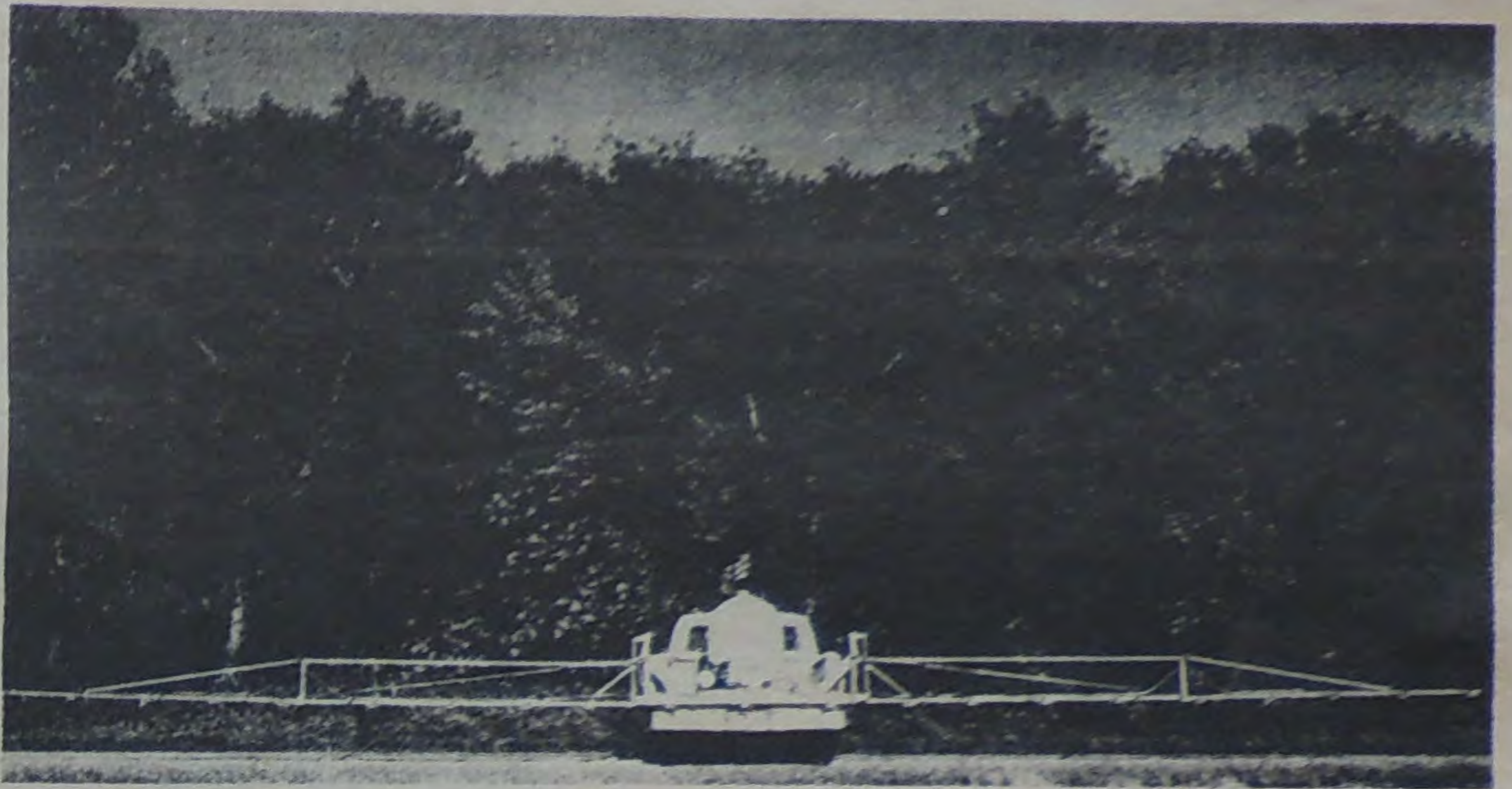
The Germans in Russia were concerned with preserving their German ways. I can't remember a case in my community in which a German married a Russian. The Germans felt superior to the Russians. Often the Russians passed through our village on their way to market. When they returned they were usually drunk. At times we were afraid of the Russians. Sometimes they would steal from us or destroy our property.

Hoffman recalled German feelings of superiority towards the Russians:

We felt we were better than the Russians. They were slower than us. They sowed, harvested, and threshed by hand. Many had no horses. Oh, they lived cheap! We had horses and machines, such as reapers, separators, and threshers. We were against mixing with the Russians because, if a German married one, their children had to go to the Russian church.

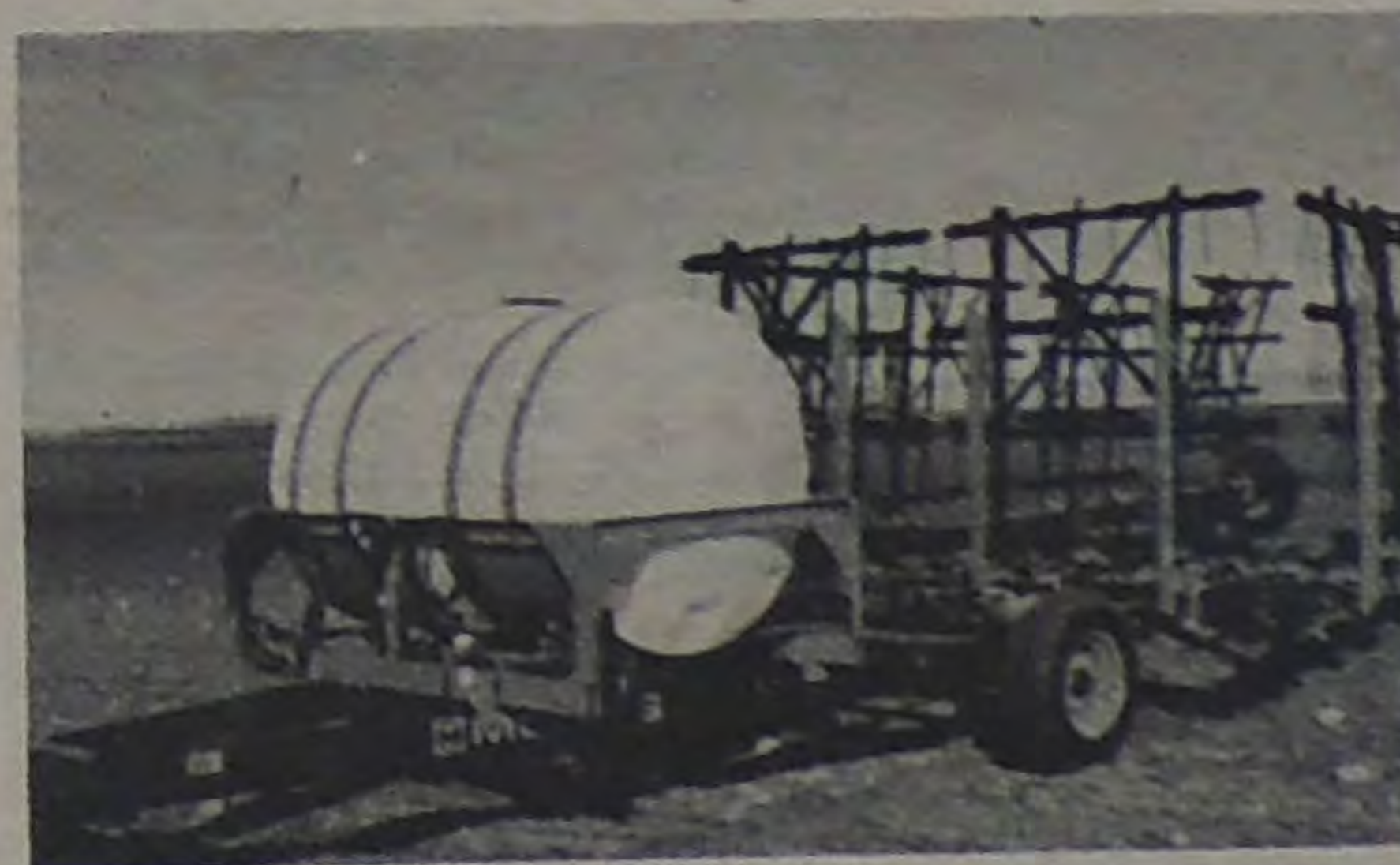
In the process of trying to maintain their identity by discouraging social intercourse with the Russian population the German-Russians developed a "colonial-consciousness," a sense of exclusivity which not only kept them apart from developments in 19th century Russia, but which ultimately contributed to keeping them out of the mainstream of North Dakota politics during the first decades—if not longer—after their arrival. This "colonial consciousness" prevented many potential German-Russian politicians from seeking public office in North Dakota beyond the local level. For here, as in Russia, the only world for the German-Russians was their community. Everything else, including state-level political positions, was regarded as part of an alien, foreign, and even threatening world, and therefore to be avoided.

The article above is part of a thesis written by William Jahraus for a master of arts degree at the University of North Dakota. Jahraus was born in Eureka, South Dakota. He is a descendant of German and German-Russian immigrants who settled in the Dakotas in the late 19th century. After graduating from Herreid, South Dakota High School in 1965, he attended Concordia College, Moorhead, Minnesota, where he earned a bachelor of arts degree in history-political science in 1970. For the past eight years he has been an instructor of American and European history at the Grafton, North Dakota, Public High School. Jahraus resides on a farmstead near Ardoch, North Dakota, with his wife, Sheryl Rae (Thostenson), and their son, Max Christian.



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The Hutterites Facing their fifth century



With their medieval manners and morality, the Hutterites seem miscast in a world taken up with progress, glitter and self-indulgence.

Communal farmers, staunch pacifists and devoutly religious, they've changed little in the 400 years since their namesake Jacob Hutter was burned at the stake in Central Europe.

Now tucked quietly away along the dusty back roads of rural North America, 25,000 world-shy Hutterites pursue their fundamentalist lifestyle in 240 colonies dotting five midwestern states and three Canadian provinces.

What's amazing about the Hutterites, says Dr. Victor Peters, a history professor at Moorhead State University, is that they've survived so long and adapted so well in a world that's moving so fast.

Peters, author of "All Things Common: The Hutterian Way of Life" (Harper and Row, 1971), is a specialist in communal societies and has spent years interviewing and studying the Hutterites. Born in Russia and educated in Canada and Germany, Peters is considered a leading world authority on Hutterite history and habit.

The Hutterites are one of three surviving Anabaptist (believing in adult baptism) sects that originated in Europe during the 16th century Protestant Reformation, sharing their longevity with the Old Order Amish and the Mennonites.

They pattern their life on the early Christian church, following to the letter the Biblical directive "...all that believed were together, and had all things common" (Acts 2:44). All Hutterites work according to their abilities and receive according to their needs, enjoying economic security from cradle to grave.

Outside of a few isolated monastic orders, Peters said, they're the only communal society in history that's lasted so long and so well.

Despite their cobwebbed visions and traditions, Peters said, the Hutterites have prospered. They have one of the fastest growing populations in the world, nearly doubling every 20 years; and their farmsteads are models of self-reliant productivity.

Fleeing Persecution

They came to the midwestern plains in the 1870s; 700 of them seeking peace and religious freedom after surviving centuries of persecution in Central Europe.

The first immigrant wave settled in Yankton, S.D., buying 2,500 remote acres with a cash downpayment of \$17,000. They chose the sparsely populated Dakota Territory, Peters said, because it sat apart from the rest of the world, a place where they thought they would be left alone.

But even in America they found persecution. As conscientious objectors during World War I, the Hutterites were harassed by their neighbors and imprisoned by the government.

Disenchanted, and facing the same kind of oppression they suffered in the Old World, all but one of the colonies migrated to Canada. After 1945, when more favorable laws were passed protecting pacifists, some moved back to the United States.

Hutterite colonies are now scattered

across the Dakotas, Montana, western Minnesota, Washington and in the Canadian provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

Dour and Dusty

Their antique way of life keeps the Hutterites insulated from the outside world. But it's also held the group together for nearly half a millennium, setting up a protective wall between them and the trendy 20th century.

Modeling the "meek and quiet spirits" of the apostles, the Hutterites deliberately avoid drawing attention to themselves, Peters said. They dress and speak as their forefathers did in medieval Europe.

Hutterite clothing styles are hundreds of years out of date: somber, dark, unadorned and usually handmade. The women cover themselves with head scarves, ankle-length dresses and practical aprons—always plain and dour in color, but recently giving way to quiet prints.

Imitating the primitive Christians, the men grow beards after marriage and the women never cut their hair.

Among themselves, Peters said, they speak a near extinct German dialect, Tirolean. English is their third language behind High German, even though all Hutterite colonies have settled in English-speaking North America.

Smoking, television, radio, dancing and jewelry—including wedding rings—are forbidden. Too frivolous, the Hutterites say, and at odds with their solemn puritan commitments. Moderate drinking of alcoholic beverages, however, is accepted.

Although out of style in clothes and customs, the Hutterites are fashionable in farming. Unlike some of their historic cousins in the Mennonite and Amish sects, Peters said, the Hutterites haven't forsaken the technological advances in agriculture. In many cases they've been at the forefront of change.

It was a Hutterite who first put a cab on a tractor. Their farms are run like modern corporations, with stainless steel dairy parlors, mechanized poultry houses and the best of high-horsepowered field equipment.

"We need modern agricultural technology to get along in the world, to eat, to produce, to survive," says Joe Mandel, junior minister at the Forest River colony in Fordville, N.D. "It makes sense, it's practical in our way of life. But we don't need all this crazy music on the radio to survive."

Temptations

Despite the seductions of the outside world, few Hutterites leave the colony. During their century in North America, Peters said, fewer than 500 have strayed from the faith and nearly all of them have returned.

But some changes seem inevitable. Teenagers hide radios, tape recorders and cigarettes under their beds, some sneak into movies and more seem to be tasting the forbidden fruits of the outside world. Even illegitimate children are cropping up, once unheard of in colony life.

Says Hutterite Toni Waldner, a college

senior in his early 20s: "We're in for some hard decisions and adjustments. But we'll stick together and make it."

(Children, not considered members of the church until baptized in their late teens, are given some leeway in their moral behavior. As one Hutterite prayer begins.

"I am a little child, my heart is pure . . ."

Adults, however, as members of the church, are under a strict moral code that doesn't allow for many transgressions.)

Waldner, from the Forest River colony, intends to teach school there after earning his college degree. He and his family left the colony eight years ago, but returned recently.

"Yes, it's true, our doctrine hasn't changed in hundreds of years. And I don't expect it will. But some aspects of our life are bound to change seeing the world we live in," said Waldner, wearing a bright orange shirt that seemed foreign alongside the dark and serious garments of the colony's older men.

"In some colonies," he said, "the men-folks and particularly the younger generation dress more like they do in the outside world."

Education Scorned

Waldner was allowed to finish his college education, which he started outside the colony, because his fellow Hutterites would prefer one of its own to teach in its schools. Hutterite children are educated at the colony, usually in one-room schoolhouses, by state licensed teachers hired by the colony.

Otherwise, most Hutterite children never go beyond the eighth grade. Higher education, said Peters, is considered dangerous, a disease that can chisel away at the foundations of their simple faith.

The Hutterites oversee their own schools because they believe that public education is too worldly, tempting children with material goals and teaching them to scorn the dignity of manual labor and their simple life.

Children command their future, said Peters, so the Hutterites exercise strong control over them. As Proverbs dictates: "Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it."

Hutterite children must attend "German" school until they're 15, where they learn traditional hymns, Biblical history and how to read and write German.

Unlike most fundamentalist sects, the Hutterites don't seek converts or send out missionaries, Peters said. Instead they take care of what they already have, replenishing their population with large families, averaging about six children each.

It's true, Peters said, that very little new blood has been injected into the Hutterite line in 400 years. And that's led to the common belief that their lack of missionary spirit has soured the Hutterite bloodline. Although members are allowed to marry relatives as close as first cousins once removed, their population, Peters said, is large enough and healthy enough that the size of their genetic pool isn't really a problem. Some Hutterites adopt children if they can't have their own, and that gives the sect a broader genetic base.

Although Hutterites aren't baptized until

their late teens or early 20s, they become "young people" at 15, and can then join adults at work and at the dinner table. (Hutterites don't have kitchens in their own homes, but eat together in a communal dining room. Men eat on one side of the room, women on the other and children eat together in a separate room.)

Working to Survive

Everyone in the colony learns a trade and all jobs are of equal value—from the colony electrician to the woman who crates eggs. "If we are to survive," said one colony leader, "then we must all work together."

Peters said that Hutterites are not only good at their work—those few who do leave the colony, for example, rarely have trouble finding work—but also receive a great deal of satisfaction from their jobs.

"Some people feel that the Hutterites work at too leisurely a pace," said Peters. "But you must remember that they don't spend time at the golf course, the corner bar or in front of the television after work. Their job is their recreation and pastime."

Colony women do most of the domestic chores—cooking, sewing, caring for the children and the vegetable garden.

In some ways they're more liberated than most women.

"When we moved out of the colony," said young Waldner, "Mom had to cook three meals a day for the family, along with tending to the rest of the housework. I really felt sorry for her."

He explained that colony women take shifts in making the communal meals and aren't saddled with pots and pans every day.

And there's little trouble finding a babysitter in the colony. Everyone's either a relative or a neighbor.

Social Calm

Crime is almost nonexistent among Hutterites. No cases of murder, robbery or other major crimes have been reported in their history on this continent, Peters said. And only one suicide.

Their families are models of stability, with just one divorce and two separations on their 400-year-old records.

Peters attributes the social calm on the colony to the firm doctrine, stern upbringing and devout lifestyle of the Hutterites. Social pressure to conform is very strong.

When a member of the colony breaks a rule, the offender is isolated and shunned. He can't talk, work, eat or socialize with the others. "It seems to work much better than our method of segregating lawbreakers in prisons," Peters said.

Because competition is less keen than on the outside, and because of their economic security, the Hutterites seem to enjoy a life more conducive to mental health. Even the handicapped are taken care of, and given responsibilities. Unlike many families today, the Hutterites don't look on their disabled, children and elderly as burdens, but as assets and equal partners in the community.

Division

Once a colony's population reaches 150—every 20 years at their current population rate—it divides like a biological cell. At 150, Peters said, colony jobs overlap and a sense of community becomes unstuck.

When a colony reaches that point, they buy new land and then workers are sent out to build a new community. When ready, members of the colony are separated by family and occupation and then draw lots to see who stays with the old and who moves to the new colony. All assets and debts are equally divided between the two sister colonies.

Their Future

The Hutterites are beginning to find their population increase difficult to accommodate, Peters said. Farmland is scarce and expensive.

Even though the Hutterites are self-sufficient and productive farmers, they rarely accumulate wealth because of the costs of division. At the Forst River colony, for example, they raise and grow most of their food and spend only about \$100 a month in groceries for all 60 people there.

Already some colonies are settling on acreage once thought too small, Peters said, making up for the loss in land by venturing more aggressively into agricultural commerce and industry.

Most communal groups seem to fail,

Peters said, because they rely on the strength or charisma of a leader, who eventually dies or falls from grace. The Hutterites, however, aren't powered by a personality, but by a doctrine, tradition and their own history.

As Waldner said, summing up the belief of most Hutterites: "I believe our life in Christ and the ideals He taught us can best be lived to the fullest extent in a community setting."

Yet even without the glue of a towering leader or governing body, the 25,000 Hutterites still dress, believe and behave

alike even though they're spread across thousands of miles, two countries and four centuries.

Why? Maybe it's the willingness of the Hutterites to submerge their personalities in their community and faith, Peters said.

As one Hutterite leader put it: "Each grape must be crushed to give strength to the wine. People want to live together and keep to themselves. It won't work."

Meanwhile, the Hutterites approach their fifth century together against odds and surroundings that seem almost insurmountable. □

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PEOPLE



Front row: Mr. and Mrs. Ladis Raba, Mr. and Mrs. Garret Kosters, Mr. and Mr. John Kosters, (anniversary couple), Mr. and Mrs. Peter Koster, Mr. and Mrs. Martin Raba. Picture was taken in 1976.

All in the Family

Little did everyone know then, but an event which took place in the autumn of 1929 was to be highly contagious. The event was a wedding. Well, what's so extraordinary about that?

Read on.

The marriage of Peter Kosters and Theresa Raba was at St. Anthony's Catholic Church in Selby, South Dakota (a

community of more than 1,000 friendly people). And it was the beginning of five brothers and sisters marrying in the Koster and Raba families.

What's more, these five marriages all took place at St. Anthony's Catholic Church.

All of the couples still reside in Selby, except for the youngest couple, which

moved to Mina, South Dakota.

With these five couples, there are 48 double first cousins, with seven deceased.

In 1976, when the Kosters and Rabas had a grand family reunion, all were able to attend except for one person. They came from 13 states and the Midway Islands.

Laurena (Kosters) Idler of Selby reports: "We have 107 first cousins and 202 first cousins once removed."

That's quite a family!

And on Sept. 25, Peter and Theresa celebrated their golden wedding anniversary, marking the date 50 years ago when two families took a good look at each other—and liked what they saw! □

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HOBBIES—

Carpet samples become work of art

Craft hobbies are always fun and it seems especially true at Christmas time. Each year new craft ideas are exchanged and passed on by many.

Lenora Geiszler of Ashley, North Dakota has many craft hobbies and always has her eyes and ears open for new ideas.

Last Christmas she created a masterpiece which is a "good conversation piece." It is a large Bethlehem scene on light blue burlap, mounted on a white styrofoam panel. The picture size is approximately 64 inches long by 34 inches wide.

Carpet samples were used for the figures. Using a carpet knife, Mrs. Geiszler cut navy blue carpet into the shape of the three wisemen. She chose brown for the camels. Other colors used in the scene were green for the large palm tree with brown bark, gold for the star, stone and clay colors for Bethlehem City, and a sand color for the background scene of hills.

A brown braiding made out of wool yarn outlines each figure. The star is outlined with gold yarn.

Mrs. Geiszler received assistance in creating the braiding which was made with an electric drill, a 30-second operation. The yarn was pasted on with glue.

She came upon the idea to make the piece of art when she received a Christmas card with the Bethlehem scene depicting the three wisemen on their camels.

A 5-ft., 7-in. tree made entirely of pine cones, adorned with miniature lights, is one of many Christmas craft creations which Mrs. Geiszler's friends have admired at her home.

Ceramic-making is a favorite hobby of Lenora's. She also likes to give ceramic pieces as gifts. In addition, Mrs. Geiszler has a number of afghans with interesting designs, such as an embroidery cross stitch knit afghan, plus others.

Mrs. Geiszler is always willing to share craft ideas and is always interested in new ideas. She has also made a number of other burlap wall hangings featuring flowers, also out of carpet samples, and has assisted several friends in making some.



Lenora Geiszler of Ashley with some of her favorite Christmas wall-hangings.

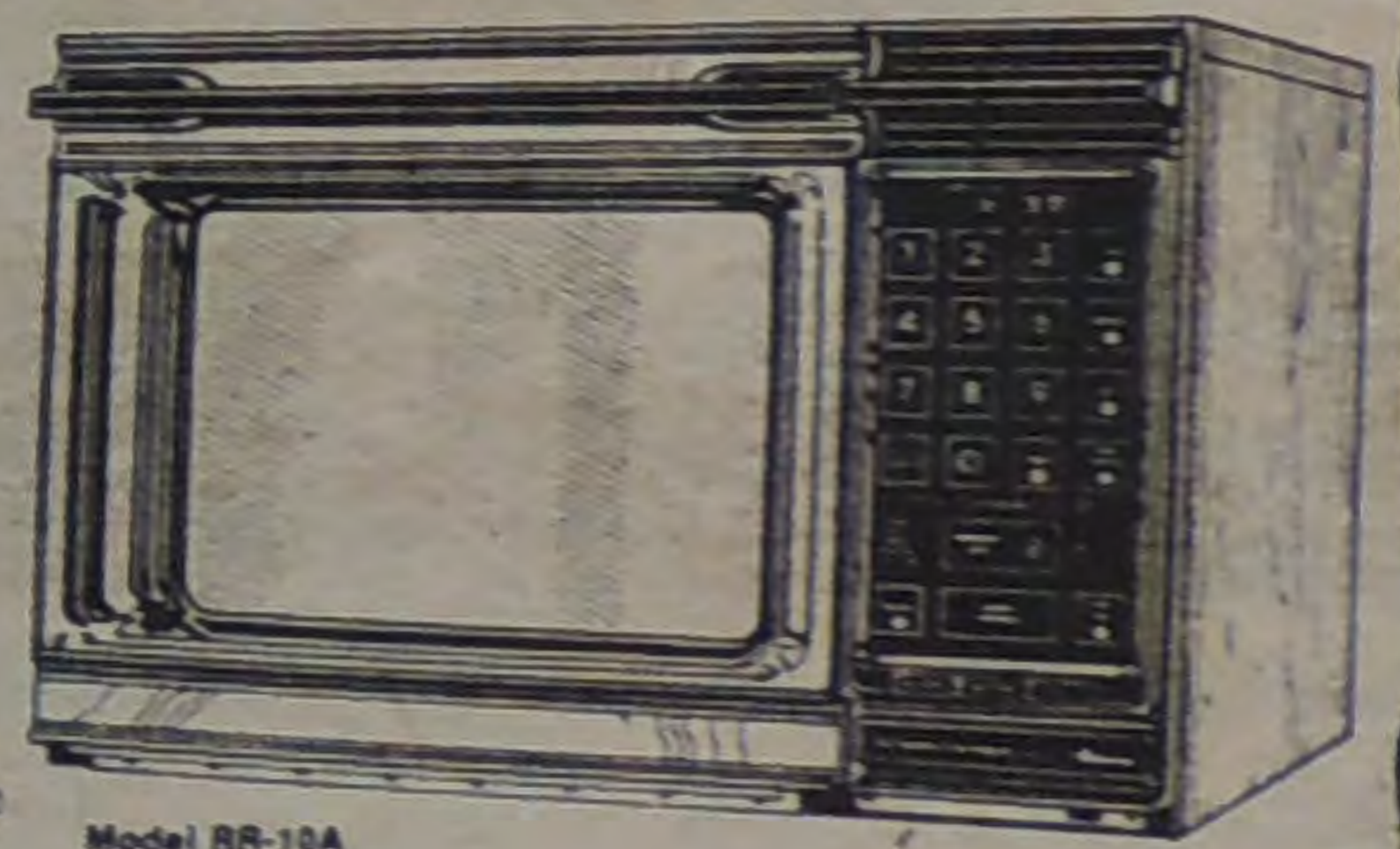
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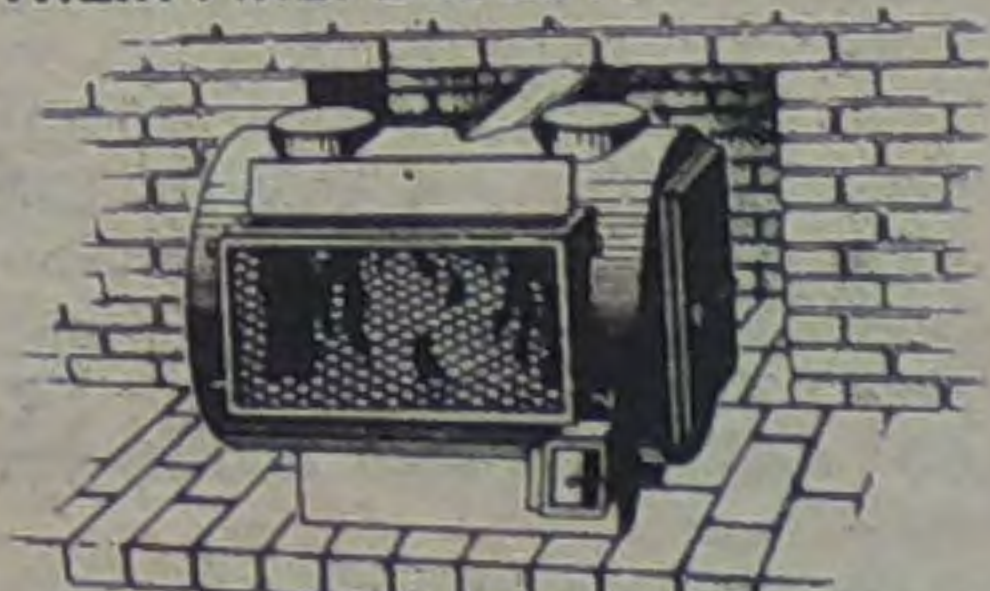
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The
Way
It
Was

By Lenora Reisdorph

“Times have changed,” we say. But many happenings from the 1920s, now 50 years past, sound like today’s news. Rising prices, wartime shortages, girls’ sports teams, bumper crops and building booms made headlines then as they do now. The life and times of the people who lived in Morgan, Minnesota—population 1,000—were probably reflected in other rural communities throughout our nation—and made just as interesting reading.

Postwar living costs were high, though we might not now agree. Coffee sold for 30 cents to 50 cents a pound, brick cheese was advertised at 25 cents a pound, and 10 pounds of buckwheat flour could be purchased for 50 cents. A local barbershop offered 20 cent shaves and 40 cent haircuts. First class postage had gone up to three cents. Business was thriving during much of that decade. An unimproved 40 acres of land brought \$200 per acre. The high-producing cow from a prize dairy herd brought \$196 and calves averaged \$57.25 each. Cattle from another herd sold for \$16 per hundredweight, setting an eight-year record at the South St. Paul market. Malinda apples were advertised by a local grower at \$1.25 in bulk, or \$1.50 in bushel baskets.

Cars must have been a prime topic of conservation than as they are today. Cars made the news in a variety of ways, from the decreasing price of gasoline, to the frequent auto accidents then, to “who bought what kind where.” Radical changes were announced by Ford Motor Company in 1916. Their closed cars were made available in colors with matching upholstery; bodies and chassis were lower; and the bodies were streamlined. All this without a price increase! In fact, the price of Fords went down about 10 percent late that year. Chevy, also, had lowered its prices.

Gas Costs Declined

Gasoline prices were going down! In 1925, low test gas (remember that phrase?) was advertised at 21.1 cents per gallon with high test at 24.1 cents. Early in 1929, low test could be bought for 18.1 cents per gallon. Motorists were apprised of a new law governing auto lights: every motor vehicle using the highways had to have front and rear lamps lighted a half-hour after sunset until a half-hour before sunrise.

A car was a symbol of prestige but it seemed far less safe to drive than our vehicles. Quite a number of Morgan people traveled as far as the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, a distance of more than 100 miles, but there were also many accidents. If a car of that time hit a rut or a bump or a ridge of gravel, the wheel was knocked out of line and the car couldn’t be steered properly. Many a time such an incident resulted in a car tipping over in the ditch. An in an open car, injury was assured.

People learned to drive “by guess and by golly” so the driver or the driving probably figured in many accidents. Then, too, drivers probably did not understand their cars or the rules of driving very well. In one true story coming out of the early 1920s, a group of Morgan men were driving in an open car on a windy day. When “smoke” began coming up through the floor boards, one passenger panicked, jumped to his feet and began trying to stamp out what he thought was a fire (it proved to be only steam and exhaust). He promptly fell out of the car which was moving at about 40 miles an hour!

The American Motorists’ Association offered statistics to show that it cost \$1 a day to own and operate a car in 1928. The life of a car was considered to be seven years and the average retail price was

\$953. I wonder what today's figures would be?

It could be said today: Train service in our little town was reduced from two round trips daily to only one. Because of widespread protest, the second run was restored six weeks later. All of this happened in 1925. Two years after that, train service was reduced again. The order stipulated that the train would leave Redwood Falls at 9 a.m. and arrive in Sleepy Eye, Minnesota, some 27 miles away, at about 10:45. The return trip began at 3:05 p.m. How nice with the prohibitive price of gasoline today to be able to take the train for business or shopping!

Long before the equal rights movement, Morgan girls were playing basketball. Team members were required to "retire before eleven, except for holidays and vacations, eat less sweets and take the best care of their physical conditions." Interest in wrestling ran high in the 1920s. Morgan's "pro," J.L. "Jess" Slaymaker, won most of his matches. At the high point of his career, he threw Canadian champion Kid Hiatt.

Home talent plays given by church and school groups were popular. Our small town might give two or three in one calendar year. They were "put on" in the community hall and drew capacity crowds. After all, TV was only a faint gleam in someone's mind then!

Radio was the "in" thing. One store suggested a Pearson five-tube set with Thorola loud speaker as a Christmas gift in 1925. Complete price for the radio set, tubes, B battery, wet battery, antenna and loudspeaker, plus installation, was \$100.

Old-time fiddling contests were fun, too. Programs included fiddle playing in solos or groups, fiddling and dancing simultaneously, and music played on other



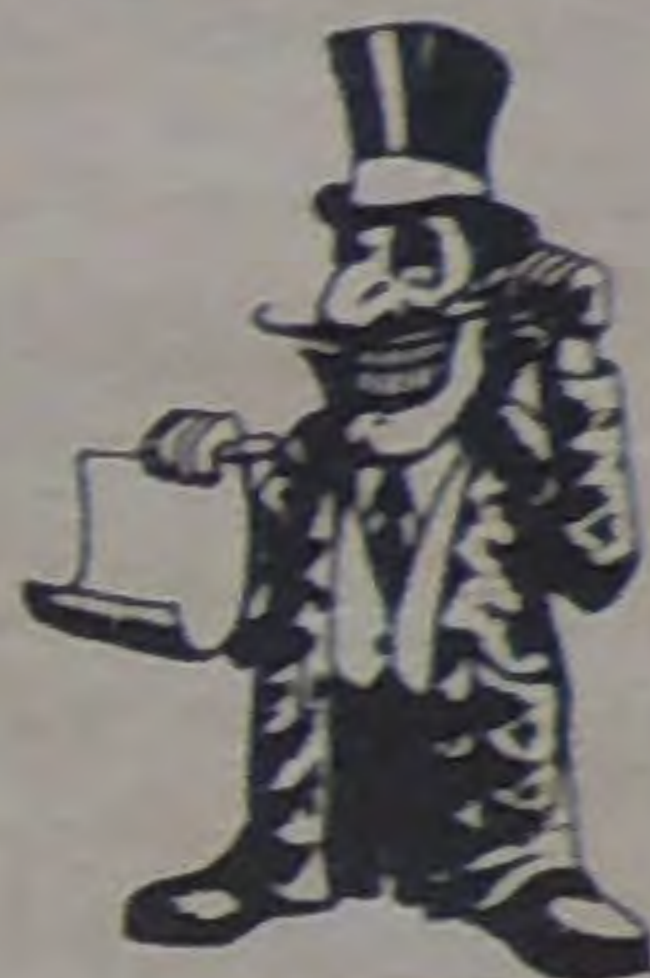
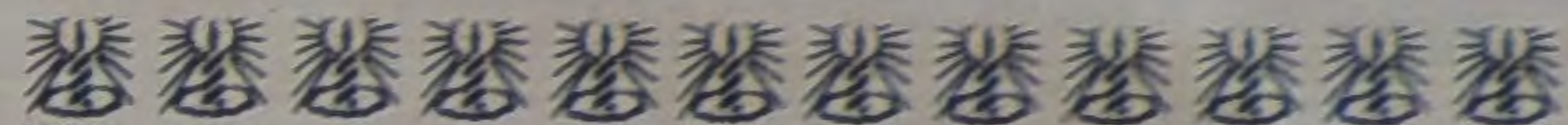
Small town theatres showing all-talking moving pictures—quite the rage.

instruments.

Some small town theatres were showing their first "100 percent all talking, singing and dancing pictures" in 1929. Admission was 25 cents and 50 cents. That same year, the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad offered a one-day round trip excursion rate to Chicago for \$9.50. Annual cornhusking contests, another rural recreation, have long since given way to automation.

A Stormy December

If weather could defeat human beings, it might have done so in December 1927. A



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snowstorm early that month raged for four days and five nights, making it the stormiest December in many years. Citizens used shovels to open three of the roads leading out of town. Two other roads were not opened for traffic until Christmas Eve!

The big county plow—there was only one, it seems—traveling at three and one-half miles per hour, took about four days to clean up the 225 miles of county roads.

After that particular storm, however, it made slower progress because it had to be dug out of drifts repeatedly. Some of those drifts were as high as telephone poles. Records showed it to be the coldest December since 1886 and the greatest December snowfall since 1891.

The county commissioners calculated that clearing the roads after three major storms during the month cost \$300 per day, for a total of \$5,400. They set up a new policy in which the entire road maintenance budget would be spent during the summer. Many people, it was felt, did not need the roads opened in the wintertime. Many who lived on side roads didn't benefit anyway.

Another story coming out of this period seems funny now but perhaps it wasn't then. Gypsies—remember them?—driving large touring cars invaded Morgan and "lifted" \$30 from a local businessman's pocket. When he realized what had happened, he must have swung into fast action because the thieves were apprehended and the stolen money recovered. A complaint was filed and the gypsy women jailed. Their chief, however, put up \$500 cash bail to guarantee their appearance at a hearing two days later. But then they skipped out leaving the county \$500 richer!

During the 1920s, the small-town newspaper was an all-inclusive package of reading material. It probably ran a continued serial story with one or more chapters in each issue. There may have been an article on history or geography each week, complete with pictures. Syndicated state and national news appeared, condensed for speedy reading. There were columns on cooking, fashions and sewing, and patterns could be ordered directly.

Advertising was of two types. Many local ads appeared but there were also weekly ads derived from contracts made directly with national companies such as Camel and Chesterfield cigarettes and the Ford Motor Company. And then there were the patent medicine pitches which seem so amusing to us 50 years later.

The style and format of newspaper writing were much different then. Funerals, weddings and auto accidents captured front page headlines, and sports news was intermingled with other items. Classifieds also were interspersed with news or locals. Pages weren't always numbered.

Writing was subjective and flowery. In reporting weddings, accidents and funerals, the editor wrote his description in minute detail and included his personal sympathy or congratulations. Editorial comments were not restricted to an editorial column but were added when and where the editor was moved to make a personal comment.

Life was slower and simpler then. We worked harder and created our own entertainment. Having no television saved many hours, I do believe! Yes, the decade of the '20s created its own very special memories and contributed something valuable to what we call the "Good Ole Days."

Lenora Reisdorph is a free-lance writer who lives in Morgan, Minnesota. Although her research for the above story was solely from Morgan, those events "must have echoed in many another upper midwest community." Mrs. Reisdorph is formerly from Ellendale, North Dakota.

Favorite Christmas recipes

Christmas-time is a time to make the holiday even more of a festival with

special foods. Here are some recipes

PEANUT BRITTLE (Olga Kost, Ashley, N.D.)

3 cups sugar
1 cup white syrup
½ cup water
1 pkg. raw peanuts
2 tsp. soda
In saucepan stir together sugar, syrup and water. Cook over medium heat. Stir until boiling and continue cooking without stirring until temperature reaches 280 degrees. Then stir in peanuts and cook to 300 degrees. When 300 degrees is reached, remove from heat and stir in soda gently but quick. Add ½ tsp. salt and 1 tbsp. butter. Mix and put on buttered cookie sheets which have been heated in oven.

COCONUT CANDY (Olivia Schaeffer, Ashley, N.D.)

2 lbs. powdered sugar
¼ lb. butter, melted
1 pkg. coconut flakes (14-oz. pkg.)
2 cups nutmeats or less
1 can Eagle Brand sweetened condensed milk
Mix together and roll in balls. Dip in chocolate:
1 large pkg. chocolate chips

½ block wax
Put on buttered wax paper when dipped.

LEFSE (Lois Olofson, Ashley, N.D.)

7 cups cooked potatoes, cooled and riced (white russets work best)
2 cups flour
5-7 tbsp. butter, melted
1 tsp. salt
2 tbsp. sugar
Mix thoroughly. Roll thin - any size. Bake on ungreased griddle.

CORN PUDDING (Alma Fitzgerald Hayward, Calif.)

2 cans cream-style corn
½ cup sugar
4 tbsp. flour
1 cup milk
4 eggs
2 tsp. salt
¼ tsp. pepper
½ tsp. nutmeg
4 tbsp. butter or margarine, melted
Mix all ingredients except butter. Put in a greased baking dish. Pour melted butter over top. Bake in pre-heated 350 degree oven for 40 to 45 minutes.

FRUIT FUDGE (Mrs. John Kramer)

3 cups sugar

1 tbsp. cocoa
1 ¼ cup milk
2 tbsp. corn syrup
1 tbsp. butter
1 cup of cut up walnuts
1 cup raisins
¾ cup of cut figs
¼ cup of coconut
(Mrs. Kramer states she grinds the fruits instead of cutting them)

Place the sugar and cocoa in a saucepan and blend. Add milk, syrup and butter. Cook gently without stirring until a soft ball is formed (238 degrees). Remove from stove and cool mixture to room temperature. Add the fruit, walnuts and coconut. Stir until thick and creamy. Pour into a buttered pan and when somewhat firm, cut into squares.

BLUEBERRY JELLO (Mrs. John Maier Flint, Michigan)

2 small boxes grape jello
2 cups hot water
Cool and add:
1 can blueberry pie filling
1 large can crushed pineapple juice and all.
Let set and top with:
1 cup sour cream
½ cup sugar
1 8-oz. pkg. cream cheese



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